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UNCLAS MUSCAT 001488

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: TBIO KSCA EAGR ECON PREL SOCI MU ESTH

SUBJECT: OMAN PASSES ON AVIAN FLU PARTNERSHIP

REF: A. MUSCAT 1464 B. STATE 182324 C. STATE 180478

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Summary

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11. (SBU) Summary. A Ministry of Health official said that Oman will not participate in the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (IPAPI), or in the October 6-7 senior officials meeting. However, he outlined the steps that Oman has already undertaken steps to prepare for a potential outbreak of avian influenza, and expressed interest in collaborating on a regional basis. End Summary.

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Oman's Strategy

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12. (SBU) On October 3, Econoff met with Dr. Salah al-Awaidy, Director of the Department of Surveillance and Disease Control, Ministry of Health, to discuss Oman's interest in joining IPAPI and participating in the senior officials meeting scheduled for October 6-7 in Washington, DC (ref B). Al-Awaidy said Oman would pass on both accounts. Al-Awaidy noted that Oman was well underway in preparing itself for a potential outbreak of avian influenza, specifically in the areas of:

(a) Surveillance. Al-Awaidy cited Oman's collaboration with the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control through the establishment of four sentinel surveillance sites. These sites obtain throat swabs that are then sent to the NAMRU-3 laboratory in Cairo for analysis. In addition, the National Zoonotic Committee, comprised of members from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, has developed indicators to detect the presence of avian influenza. Furthermore, poultry bred in Oman are bled twice a year to ascertain whether the virus is in circulation.

(b) Public awareness. Al-Awaidy noted that the Ministry of Health already has launched an avian influenza public awareness campaign. The Ministry, in association with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, sponsors lectures and workshops for health care and poultry workers to detect and quarantine cases of avian influenza. The Ministry of Health also featured a "frequently asked questions" article on avian influenza in its January 2005 newsletter, and plans to distribute an avian influenza pamphlet, in Arabic, by mid-October.

(c) Preparedness planning. Al-Awaidy stated that officials from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture are working closely to finalize a specific preparedness plan for avian influenza. Based on a generic preparedness blueprint for epidemics, this plan will outline Oman's efforts in stockpiling necessary medications, acquiring diagnostic capabilities, and exploring developments in vaccinations.

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Open to Regional Cooperation

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13. (SBU) While not committed to joining the Partnership, al-Awaidy welcomed the opportunity to collaborate on a regional level, particularly among GCC countries, to share information on recent developments in diagnostic capabilities, preparedness planning, and progress in identifying possible vaccinations.

BALTIMORE